

IFR Staff
Somewhere between checking your email on Google and praying for a \$400 Garmin 396 on eBay, you're probably using the web for your flight planning. There's some great stuff out there. We asked our contributors to chime in with what they liked best.

There was a lot of consensus but no two people had quite the same list. That part of why the web rocks: You can find the right group of tools for you. The problem is where to find the gems amidst the dreck (or the Ads-by-Google).

Just to limit the field a bit, we're only going to look at free websites. So AOPA's flight planner or Weathermeister is off the table for this review. While there is a lot of overlap

between the different websites, we can organize them a bit for convenience.

Flight Planning

The go-to site when it comes to flight planning for the IFR pilot is FltPlan.com (www.fltplan.com). Practically the posterchild for function over form, the site isn't pretty or particularly well-designed. It does, however, make a bunch of flight planning tasks easier, especially for recurring trips.

FltPlan.com lets you set up stored aircraft and flight plans. When you select an aircraft and build a flight plan, the data comes out the way a pilot thinks about it: Departure and approach procedures are a click away, a wind matrix lets you look

at several altitudes with the probably best altitude shown in green, alternates are suggested by proximity, and the phone numbers for the FBO appear automatically. Weather is available—official, FAA weather—for your routes with some nice touches like decoded nearby airports and separation of NOTAM (D) and FDC NOTAMS. You can also get the same info without a flight plan just by entering a departure and destination airport.

One great feature is putting all this info into a quick nav log with key frequencies and phone numbers as well as a takeoff and landing data card (TOLD) you can fill out for the flight. We'd like to see some way to get fuel burns and such on the TOLD from the flight plan, but it's a good start.

A favorite feature of FltPlan.com is that it can file your flight plans, even scheduling them weeks in advance. There's also a good system for finding fuel stops, but prices are missing for many airports. Better to use AirNav for that.

AirNav (www.airnav.com) has long held the title as the favorite

Right: Fltplan.com has the added bonus of showing commonly-filed routes and ATC-assigned routes between your departure and destination. The navigation log (**below**) is one of several handy printouts to take with you.

Navigation Log		FltPlan.com		Sunday 10-05-08 Page: 0033 - Act: 0051		Save
FR	ROUTE	Typ	CRZ	1000ft	Sp	RT/WM
Leg: 01002	7.000	FILED ROUTE (see below)				
Leg: 01003	Leg: 001					
Leg: 01004	Leg: 002					
Leg: 01005	Leg: 003					
Leg: 01006	Leg: 004					
Leg: 01007	Leg: 005					
Leg: 01008	Leg: 006					
Leg: 01009	Leg: 007					
Leg: 01010	Leg: 008					
Leg: 01011	Leg: 009					
Leg: 01012	Leg: 010					
Leg: 01013	Leg: 011					
Leg: 01014	Leg: 012					
Leg: 01015	Leg: 013					
Leg: 01016	Leg: 014					
Leg: 01017	Leg: 015					
Leg: 01018	Leg: 016					
Leg: 01019	Leg: 017					
Leg: 01020	Leg: 018					
Leg: 01021	Leg: 019					
Leg: 01022	Leg: 020					
Leg: 01023	Leg: 021					
Leg: 01024	Leg: 022					
Leg: 01025	Leg: 023					
Leg: 01026	Leg: 024					
Leg: 01027	Leg: 025					
Leg: 01028	Leg: 026					
Leg: 01029	Leg: 027					
Leg: 01030	Leg: 028					
Leg: 01031	Leg: 029					
Leg: 01032	Leg: 030					
Leg: 01033	Leg: 031					
Leg: 01034	Leg: 032					
Leg: 01035	Leg: 033					
Leg: 01036	Leg: 034					
Leg: 01037	Leg: 035					
Leg: 01038	Leg: 036					
Leg: 01039	Leg: 037					
Leg: 01040	Leg: 038					
Leg: 01041	Leg: 039					
Leg: 01042	Leg: 040					
Leg: 01043	Leg: 041					
Leg: 01044	Leg: 042					
Leg: 01045	Leg: 043					
Leg: 01046	Leg: 044					
Leg: 01047	Leg: 045					
Leg: 01048	Leg: 046					
Leg: 01049	Leg: 047					
Leg: 01050	Leg: 048					
Leg: 01051	Leg: 049					
Leg: 01052	Leg: 050					
Leg: 01053	Leg: 051					
Leg: 01054	Leg: 052					
Leg: 01055	Leg: 053					
Leg: 01056	Leg: 054					
Leg: 01057	Leg: 055					
Leg: 01058	Leg: 056					
Leg: 01059	Leg: 057					
Leg: 01060	Leg: 058					
Leg: 01061	Leg: 059					
Leg: 01062	Leg: 060					
Leg: 01063	Leg: 061					
Leg: 01064	Leg: 062					
Leg: 01065	Leg: 063					
Leg: 01066	Leg: 064					
Leg: 01067	Leg: 065					
Leg: 01068	Leg: 066					
Leg: 01069	Leg: 067					
Leg: 01070	Leg: 068					
Leg: 01071	Leg: 069					
Leg: 01072	Leg: 070					
Leg: 01073	Leg: 071					
Leg: 01074	Leg: 072					
Leg: 01075	Leg: 073					
Leg: 01076	Leg: 074					
Leg: 01077	Leg: 075					
Leg: 01078	Leg: 076					
Leg: 01079	Leg: 077					
Leg: 01080	Leg: 078					
Leg: 01081	Leg: 079					
Leg: 01082	Leg: 080					
Leg: 01083	Leg: 081					
Leg: 01084	Leg: 082					
Leg: 01085	Leg: 083					
Leg: 01086	Leg: 084					
Leg: 01087	Leg: 085					
Leg: 01088	Leg: 086					
Leg: 01089	Leg: 087					
Leg: 01090	Leg: 088					
Leg: 01091	Leg: 089					
Leg: 01092	Leg: 090					
Leg: 01093	Leg: 091					
Leg: 01094	Leg: 092					
Leg: 01095	Leg: 093					
Leg: 01096						

Dept: **Aviation**
 Airport: **PORTLAND, ME**
 In: **Sept 18**
 Out: **Sept 18**
 Base: **PORTLAND, ME**

Distance: **240**
 True Course: **240**
 Time Zone: **EST**

Possible Altitudes: **PLN FLN HLN PLN FLN HLN PLN**

Altitude (Feet)	PLN	FLN	HLN	PLN	FLN	HLN	PLN	FLN	HLN
1000	120	150	180	210	240	270	300	330	360
1500	120	150	180	210	240	270	300	330	360

From: **PORTLAND, ME**
 To: **PORTLAND, ME**
 Date: **10/05/2017**

Altitude: **1000**
 ETD: **1000**
 EOL: **1000**
 Altitude: **1000**
 Altitude: **1000**
 Altitude: **1000**

Route Selection: **ROUTE - Vector Airways**
 Route: **PORTLAND, ME**

☐ Direct (None)
☐ Own Route: **PORTLAND, ME**

In Preferred Route or Short Route

Enter data here → **Print here for tracking** ←

Recent RR Routes used by FPLan, one more between **PORTLAND, ME**

Route	Type	Altitude
PORTLAND, ME	1000	1000
PORTLAND, ME	1000	1000
PORTLAND, ME	1000	1000
PORTLAND, ME	1000	1000
PORTLAND, ME	1000	1000

Recent Planned ATC Route between **PORTLAND, ME**

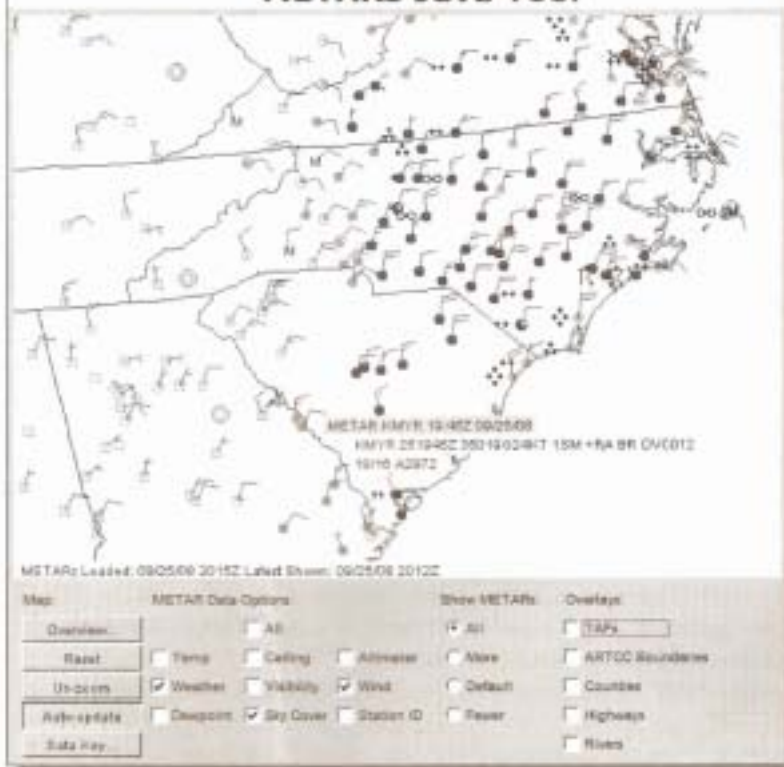
Route	Type	Altitude
PORTLAND, ME	1000	1000
PORTLAND, ME	1000	1000
PORTLAND, ME	1000	1000
PORTLAND, ME	1000	1000
PORTLAND, ME	1000	1000

Actual Weather Alerts (Includes Distance, Weather, Radar, Approaches etc.)

Minimum Sea Level	Search Radius	Approach Type required	Fuel Type required
1000	1000	1000	1000

There are no Coordinated Departure Routes (CDR) between **PORTLAND, ME**

METARs Java Tool



Left: With the ADDS METAR tool, turn off most of the station info and then view more stations and a better big picture. Roll your mouse over a station to see the details. Toggle TAFs on and off from this tool rather than launching another tool. AvnWx.com (above) lets you call ASOS through Skype while you're online as well as layering NEXRAD over a map and airport data.

place to check fuel prices and get the skinny on different FBOs. You can search for airports by name or identifier and view all the pertinent data, link to sectional charts on SkyVector, see airport diagrams and even photos of the airport. That last one can be invaluable going into some of those stealth fields. But the FBO information and reviews are one of the site's best offerings.

SkyVector (skyvector.com), which is linked off of AirNav, is a repository of scanned sectional, low-altitude, high-altitude, and specialty charts. You can zoom in, zoom out, switch from one type of chart to another and overlay flight plans and current weather. It's great for flight planning. Runway Finder (runwayfinder.com) is similar to SkyVector, except it offers sectional charts, satellite views, topo maps or a Google map. Again, you can get weather and airport information at a click.

Many of these sites show approach plates, but you should know how to view them from the source: NACO's website (naco.faa.gov) has a Free Products link to the lower left of the home page. Digital TPP lets you see high-res PDFs of anything you'd

find in a book of NACO approach charts. The Airport Facility Directory (AF/D) entries for individual airports are also available.

Weather on the Web

Sometimes you just want to grab the weather. We have two favorites. One is the ADDS METAR Java tool (adds.aviationweather.noaa.gov/java/), which effectively gives you an interactive weather depiction chart of an entire area. METARs update on this tool sooner than on several other websites. Other great Java tools are the PIREP tool and the Flight Path tool. The latter is actually a stand-alone program (java-based and free) that lets you layer METARs, winds, icing forecasts and more over a route with both top-down and profile views. The tool is invaluable in icing season. Of course, the whole ADDS site is a top pick for weather.

The other favorite is AvnWx.com (maps.avnw.com). The base is a Google-generated map, but you can see airports and weather overlaid for a radius around any point as well as NEXRAD, AIRMETs, SIGMETs, and a Surface Analysis chart for the country.

The Weather Underground has both a web interface (www.wunderground.com) and a free mobile-phone weather interface (mobile.wunderground.com). It just looks at one airport (or any location for that matter), but it has NEXRAD with several viewing options and a good forecast. Intellicast Radar (www.intellicast.com/National/Radar/Current.aspx) is also a favorite.

Advanced weather comes in many forms. Two great ones are the Skew-T diagrams and Meteograms. We like NOAA's Java Skew-Ts (rucsoundings.noaa.gov). As our weather guru Scott Dennstaedt puts it, "They aren't for the faint-hearted. However, you don't have to be a weather weenie to master their mysterious power." Meteograms provide data that's similar to TAFs—but the prediction is for three days out. An IFR subscriber made a free tool that makes the Unisys meteogram easier to read. Download it at www.carleyassociates.com/aviation/.

Flying Resources

There are some sites that don't fit any category exactly, but we find ourselves needing again and again.

The FAA pilot web (pilotweb.nas.faa.gov) has links for current NOTAMs as well as ones in the limbo of the antiquated published NOTAM system. Published NOTAMs might not come up in a briefing, but you can download the lastest PDF of them here and do a quick search.

Other handy government sites are the Aviation Safety Reporting System website (asrs.arc.nasa.gov) and Aviation System Standards (avn.faa.gov/index.asp?xml=index). The latter site lets you see instrument procedures in the making and is the first stop if you want to request a new or changed procedure at your home 'drome.

To track any IFR flight for free, there is always FlightAware (www.flightaware.com). But to hear what's going on with those flights, check out www.liveatc.net. As one of our active controller contacts put it, "The good, the bad and the ugly ... one stop shopping."

Online as well are the FARs (www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_08/14cfrv2_08.html), the AIM (www.faa.gov/airports_airtraffic/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/aim/) and the ATC bible 7110.65 (http://www.faa.gov/airports_airtraffic/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/ATC/INDEX.HTM). TERPS and even more technical documents are all over the web too, as well as simulators for many new and old GPS units.

Speaking of simulators: If your VOR navigation skills have gone completely to flab or you know someone trying to understand how anyone can navigate without a GPS, check out Tim's Air Navigation Simulator (www.visi.com/~mim/nav/). For

anyone just getting going on this IFR thing, it might be just the place to start using the web to better understand the soup in which we fly.

ATC MAKES A DEAL

continued from page 12

a 7110.65 that whenever I heard that horn, I'd stop whatever I was doing, quickly check my own radar targets and, if all were safe, I'd check my neighbor's. Boy Scout? You bet, but years later, I heard the horn, checked my targets and then glanced at the neighbor's traffic, where a new kid was hopelessly swamped and had a target bore-sighted at the same towers I'd once tried to deconstruct. Without a word, I leaned over and pointed to the conflict with enough

time for him to issue a new heading that avoided any loss of separation.

In flight, I assume that the controller at the other end of the radio is having a day just as I'd had those years back. I assume that every clearance is issued with good intent, but that stuff happens, and I won't hesitate to question any instructions. Today's GPS terrain awareness

gives the pilot a huge edge, but so did that low-altitude horn I managed to ignore. Anyone can screw up and turn a boring day into a nightmare.

If we're lucky, the only lasting results can be forgotten with the rest of the detritus at the bottom a desk drawer.

Paul Berge is the former editor of IFR and hopes Miss December knows he will only wait so long.

HEAR MORE HERE

What's hot on the web is always a moving target. Online communities have always held promise but no one has quite nailed it yet for aviators. Cirrus Village creator Scott Prinz hopes to change that—at least for Cirrus owners. To hear what makes Cirrus Village different and why even non-Cirrus



owners might want to check it out, log onto our sister publication, www.avweb.com and click the PODCAST button, then the Podcast Index.
